CHESTERS ROMAN FORT

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Chesters Roman Fort

NORTHUMBERLAND

by

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The plan of the Civilian Settlement shown on the site map (Fig. 3) at the end of the Guide is based on an interpretation by Dr. Peter Salway of an air photograph by Dr. J. K. St. Joseph, Curator in Aerial Photography in the University of Cambridge.

I. The Site

In Northumberland *chesters* has been the term applied commonly to any ancient fortified site, and in particular to the ruins of a Roman fort, usually as a suffix to some specific name; but only the Chesters on North Tyne, between Chollerford bridge and Walwick bank, has come to be known by that name alone, as though to indicate that it is the outstanding example of its class. Generations of visitors to Hadrian's Wall would certainly subscribe to that view, for in many ways Chesters is the most rewarding of all the Wall forts to examine. It lacks the wild grandeur of Housesteads, where there are distant views and long stretches of the Wall itself to be seen, as well as the excavated buildings of the fort and of the civilian settlement outside it; but Chesters has in compensation the remarkable Roman bridge abutment, the finest specimen of a military bath-house to be found in Britain, buildings of great interest inside the fort, a museum rich in Roman inscriptions and sculptures and small finds of all kinds, and a delightful setting in one of the most beautiful valleys in Northumberland. The fort stands on a level shelf, high enough above the bank of North Tyne to be free from all risk of flooding, but it never enjoyed very extensive views, even before modern plantations ringed it round; there is higher ground on all sides of it, and it is only upstream, past Chollerford, that it can be said to have had a good outlook. In this respect, however, it can be matched by many Roman forts; their sites were normally chosen with an eye to amenity, as the permanent bases for units whose military operations would as a rule take place elsewhere, and not as defensive strongholds: the Roman army was trained to fight in the field, and it was only in the closing stages of the occupation of Britain that its frontier forts, with greatly reduced garrisons, became mere strong-points of a static defence.

The first recorded visitors to Chesters, in the reign of Elizabeth I, noted that there were the ruins of a Roman fort there, and of a bridge across North Tyne, but they gave no further details of what they had seen. It was left to a succession of eighteenth-century antiquaries to place on record the discoveries of Roman inscriptions and sculptures which proved the fort to have been garrisoned by a cavalry regiment 500 strong—*ala II Asturum*, the Second Asturian Horse—and to be the *Cilurnum* of the *Notitia Dignitatum*, an early fifth-century document which gives (amongst many other details) a list of the Wall forts and their garrisons from east to west. The name is Celtic and seems to

mean 'cauldron', descriptive no doubt of a whirlpool in North Tyne hard by; its root survives in the modern names of Chollerford and Cbollerton, and there is reason to suppose that it also underlies the name of *Scythles-cester* 'near the Wall' (*juxta murum*), at which on 23 September 788 King Aelfward of Northumbria was murdered. Tbe early visitors found the site a mass of ruins, sbowing traces of a street-system inside the fort itself and an extensive area to the east and south of it packed with the remains of buildings. One visitor, Bishop Pococke (who was there in 1760), was sbown 'a cavity called Adam's Garden, and a narrow building terminating in a semicircle, which they told me was lately discovered and was arcbed over', perhaps part of the commandant's bath-house (p. 20 below). But so much detail is quite exceptional; we have usually to content ourselves with the bare record of a visit, as when a militia officer, in June 1761, records in his diary that on a Saturday afternoon 'Jack, Bob and Self went to the Chesters to view the remains of the Roman Fort and Bridge'.

In 1796 the estate was purchased by Nathaniel Clayton, and he proceeded to bave the ruins levelled and grassed over, to form a park between the garden of his mansion and the river. In the process, his workmen found—and he left on view—the vaulted chamber now identifiable as the sunken strong-room in tbe headquarters building (p. 19 below), and he began to form the collection of Roman antiquities which was to be enlarged very substantially by his son and successor John Clayton (1792–1890). The latter succeeded to the property in 1832, and from 1843 onwards at intervals he did a good deal of excavation, uncovering most of the structures now visible, and some others which are no longer to be seen; he published, or let otbers publisb, reports on the most interesting excavations, but there is no full record of his work, and to some extent it has been necessary to reconstruct the course of it from the successive editions of Jobn Collingwood Bruce's books on tbe Roman Wall, or from casual references in the publications of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne. John Clayton's nephew and successor, Nathaniel George Clayton, excavated the barracks in the north-east quarter of the fort, and built the museum in which the Roman antiquities from Chesters and from other Wall forts on the Clayton estate are preserved. During the past sixty years there has been little further excavation on the site, apart from trenching to investigate various points of detail, so that the remains at present visible are in the main a memorial to the Clayton regime. In 1929 the estate was acquired by the late Captain A. M. Keith, and in 1954 tbe remains of the fort, bath-house and Wall, together with the Clayton Memorial Museum, were entrusted to the

custody of the Ancient Monuments Department of what is now the Ministry of Public Building and Works, under whose care the bridge abutment had been since 1946.

The most important accounts of excavations at Chesters, or of the buildings to he seen there, are as follows: (*a*) *Archaeologia Aeliana* (Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle): 1st series, iii 142–7 (commandant's house); 2nd series, vi 80–6 and xvi 328–38 (the bridge), vii 171–6 (main east gate), viii 211–21 (south gate) and xii 124–9 (the bath-house); 4th series, viii 219–304 (Sir George Macdonald's elaborate study of the bath-house) and xx 134–54 (fort gateways). (*b*) *Proceedings* of the same Society: 3rd series, iv 134–43 (headquarters building, superseding Bruce's report of 1876, *Archaeologia* xlvi 1–8) and x 216–8 (relationship of the fort and its ditches to the Wall). Further details may be gleaned from the successive editions of Bruce's *The Roman Wall* (1851, 1853 and 1867) or from his *Handbook* (1st edition, 1863—11th edition, revised by the late Professor Sir Ian Richmond, 1957). The 1957 edition of the *Handbook*, together with the present writer's hook *Research on Hadrian's Wall* (1961), may be referred to for a fuller account of the Wall and its forts than can be given in this Guide; and some visitors may find it convenient to refer also to the Guides to Housesteads on the Wall, and to Corstopitum close to it, which have been published in the same series.

II. Historical Outline

HADRIAN himself visited Britain during the summer of A.D. 122, bringing with him a new governor for the province, Aulus Platorius Nepos, and a fresh legion, *VI Victrix*—'the Victorious Sixth'; work on his new artificial frontier between Tyne and Solway began in that year, but it took something like a dozen years to complete, and in the process there were a good many changes in the original simple plan. That plan had involved a continuous curtain-wall, pierced at intervals of a Roman mile (about 1,620 yards) by gateways spanned by watch-towers, extended southwards to provide fortified accommodation for frontier-guards, and in each mile two more towers were built at one-third and two-thirds positions respectively. These *milecastles* and *turrets*, as they are now called, were originally the only occupied structures on the line of the Wall. They afforded a close chain of signal-posts along its 80 Roman miles, from Wallsend on Tyne to Bowness on Solway, and soon (if not from the first) for another 40 Roman miles along the Cumberland coast as far as St. Bees Head; in the latter sector a wall was not necessary, of course, but the basic system of manning was extended, so that a watch could be kept against raids from the further shore of Solway. The milecastles may have held, on an average, something like 30 men each, responsible for manning the nearest turret on either side as well as their own milecastle; thus the whole force of frontier-guards will have been between 3,000 and 4,000 men. It seems clear that they were of a lower category than the regular soldiers who served in the cavalry regiments (*alae*) or infantry battalions (*cohortes*) of the field army, and it seems possible that they were raised locally and employed on a short-term or even part-time basis; their task, controlling traffic across the frontier and, on occasions, intercepting small parties of raiders, did not call for a high standard of military training. But units of the regular army were already stationed in the frontier district, several of them occupying forts along the line of the Stanegate, a Roman road whose course can still be traced for most of the way between Corbridge (where one such fort is known) and Carlisle.

The milecastles and turrets have been numbered for convenience of reference, starting with M/c.0 at Wallsend and ending with M/c.80 at Bowness on Solway; at present a fresh numbering-system is used for the extension of the system along the Cumberland coast (where, in addition, the custom has grown up of describing its units

as *mile-fortlets* and *watch-towers* respectively). The turrets in each Wall-mile are distinguished by the number of the milecastle at its eastern end, followed by *a* or *b*. On that numeration, Turret 27*a* was built a short distance west of North Tyne, and its remains were found in 1945, underlying the visible fort, 136 feet west of the inner face of its main east gateway: it is not at present exposed but visitors to Housesteads (another Wall fort for which the Ancient Monuments Department is responsible), can see the remains of Turret 36*b* similarly overlaid by the fort which took its place. The turret was manned by a detachment provided by Milecastle 27, the site of which now appears as a low mound in the field between the former railway and the Hexham–Rothbury road, on Low Brunton farm (excavation-report in *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4th series, xxxi 165–74); another detachment occupied the Brunton turret (26*b*), itself in the custody of the Ancient Monuments Department, at present the finest specimen of a turret to be seen anywhere on the line of the Wall: it is approached by a well-marked footpath from the same main road.

Hadrian's original plan clearly envisaged peaceful conditions under which no serious military operations were likely to be required, at least in the vicinity of the Wall—which must be thought of as marking the boundary of a great estate, which imperial policy proposed to develop intensively, rather than as a defensive barrier of military significance. But before long there must have been a marked deterioration in Rome's relations with the uncontrolled peoples beyond the frontier, and it was decided to meet the new situation by building forts for cavalry regiments and infantry battalions on the line of the Wall itself, in several cases at positions already occupied by turrets, while at Greatchesters the fort covers the remains of M/c.43. Inscriptions from Benwell and Haltonchesters show that the change came while Platorius Nepos was still governor of Britain, and excavations at the latter fort (report in *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4th series, xiv 151–71) have helped to demonstrate the structural sequence for which Chesters itself has not yet yielded such complete evidence. At Chesters the original project had been carried out in part only: Turret 27*a* had been built, together with a short length of Wall on either side of it—just sufficient to serve as buttresses to the turret—while the ditch for the Wall had been dug completely; the fort-builders had to fill in the ditch and demolish the turret before they could proceed with their task. As at Benwell, Rudchester and Haltonchesters, they built the fort with its main side gates immediately north of the Wall, in order to allow a maximum force of cavalry to sally from the fort at a moment's notice. This makes it plain that the reason for placing units of the regular army in the new forts had nothing to do with

static defence of the Wall; it was to allow of energetic northward thrusts from the spring-board which the Wall afforded. With the three cavalry forts just mentioned, Chesters could contribute to a cavalry brigade 2,000 strong for operations ranging far into the Northumberland plain, or the foothills of the Cheviot range; and the mere presence of a cavalry regiment here would be the best insurance against ill-disposed northerners trying to give trouble to the frontier-guards, let alone attempting to cross the Wall into the Roman province.

In the sector between Wallsend and North Tyne the new forts served their purpose, but further west additional forts had to be added, before the end of Hadrian's reign—at Carrawburgh *circa* A.D. 130 and at Carvoran, near Greenhead, as late as A.D. 137—as if to indicate that there was a more vigorous reaction against the new frontier from the tribes of south-west Scotland; and within a year of the death of Hadrian in A.D. 138 a new governor of Britain, Lollius Urbicus, came to lead its army into Scotland and to establish a new artificial frontier between Forth and Clyde. At least some of the units from Hadrian's Wall took part in the forward movement and were assigned new stations further north; at Benwell, there is evidence that an infantry battalion replaced the original cavalry regiment, and two building-inscriptions of the Sixth Legion from Chesters, one of them datable to A.D. 139, seem best interpreted as marking reconstruction of its barrack accommodation to provide for a similar replacement there. Later in the second century Hadrian's Wall seems for a time to have been put into service once more, garrisons being withdrawn from Scotland (*c.* A.D. 158), and it may be that the fort reverted to its original role. That was certainly the case in the third century, after Severus's governors, here as elsewhere, had rebuilt the fort and the adjacent stretches of the Wall, damaged or overthrown by the northern tribesmen while Clodius Albinus and the army of Britain were fighting and losing a civil war at the battle of Lugdunum (Lyons) in February 197. Fragments of a building-inscription in the museum record work done by Severus's governor Alfenus Senecio (*c.* A.D. 205) and the procurator Oclatinius Adventus, and several inscriptions of the third century attest the Second Asturians as the fort's garrison.

How long that regiment remained at Chesters cannot be said with certainty. The *Notitia Dignitatum* purports to give the situation early in the fifth century, when Britain was already in fact cut off from the Roman Empire; but there is reason to believe that its list of Wall garrisons really reflects the situation *c.* A.D. 300 or a few years later; and in any case by the latter part of the fourth century at Chesters,

as elsewhere along the Wall, there was no longer a unit trained and equipped for service on mobile operations in the field. The Roman Empire in its decline had found it necessary to draw off more and more of the best troops from the frontier forts, improvising field armies for the defence of its heart at the expense of the provinces on its perimeter. The Duke of the Britains (as the fourth-century commander in the north of Britain was styled) disposed of a dozen mobile units, based on forts on the main lines of communication to the Wall, but the Wall forts had now become nothing but fortified villages, whose able-bodied menfolk were expected to take measures for their own defence, being allowed in compensation to live in them tax-free, cultivating what lands they could for a living; they no longer received any pay, so that it is impossible to use the evidence of coin-finds to demonstrate just how long Chesters or any other Wall fort continued in occupation. But it may be noted that a late coin-hoard from the next fort to the west, Carrawburgh, has been assigned to the early years of the fifth century rather than the close of the fourth; a Christian tombstone from Chesterholm, some ten miles to the west (now in the Chesters Museum), seems assignable to the late fifth century or even later; and the continuance of the place-name, in the form Scythlescester, into the eighth century may serve to suggest some sort of continuity of occupation by a sub-Roman population into Anglian times.

One of the additions to the original Hadrianic scheme remains to be mentioned—namely the earthwork generally known as the Vallum. This was a flat-bottomed ditch, with sides as steep as the subsoil in any given sector would allow, flanked by mounds of earth, usually revetted with laid turf but sometimes with stone, and running at varying distances to the south of the Wall. Its place in the sequence is now securely established, coming later than the first series of forts (including Chesters) but earlier than that at Carrawburgh, datable to *c.* A.D. 130 by a fragmentary inscription now to be seen in the Chesters Museum. The course of the Vallum past Chesters fort is at present uncertain, for in Roman times its ditch was filled in there as elsewhere, to provide more room for the houses and shops which gradually crowded round the fort. It seems clear that one aim of Hadrian's frontier policy was to encourage the growth of a vigorous civilian population in the frontier districts, and on many frontiers we find the same picture (best known on Hadrian's Wall at Housesteads) of a considerable village, or even a small town, ultimately growing up under the shelter of a Hadrianic fort. Some of the inhabitants were no doubt traders, attracted by the assured market afforded by 500 or 1,000 men, all receiving regular pay; others were retired soldiers, who

preferred to settle down where most of their service had been performed, rather than return to perhaps distant homes—though it must be remembered that another reason for Hadrian's policy was to provide a convenient reservoir of recruits near at hand. The cavalry regiment at Chesters might be called the Second Asturians, but there seems little likelihood that any of its men, even in Hadrian's day, came from as far afield as Spain; and in the third century a good many of the troopers, if not of their officers as well, were probably Britons born, many of them no doubt soldiers' sons from the village outside the fort. As yet, that village remains virtually untested by the spade, but air photographs taken in the exceptionally dry summer of 1949 revealed that there is a considerable built-up area stretching for a good way south of the fort, containing buildings some of which look to be even more impressive than those now to be seen in the similar settlement at Housesteads; and there is an indication in the photographs that the Vallum, as in the proved cases of Benwell and Haltonchesters, made a symmetrical diversion southwards, to pass well clear of the fort. It is to be hoped that one day excavation will be possible, to test the point, and to reveal in detail something of the character of the overlying buildings of the village. If we bear in mind that the Roman cavalryman received higher pay than his brother in the infantry, we may expect to find a more comfortable standard of living attested here than at Housesteads.

The purpose of the Vallum has for long been a controversial question, but it is now generally recognised that its principal function was to provide an adequate obstacle against unauthorised intruders from the south. Where roads from the south crossed its line, they were carried on stone-revetted causeways spanned by arched gateways, the gates being closed from the north (as may be seen in the crossing at Benwell, preserved as an Ancient Monument), and a similar arrangement has been inferred for the less important crossings by which traffic moving along the south side of the Vallum ditch could gain access by branch tracks to the milecastles. The earthwork, though less costly and a less formidable obstacle than the Wall, was clearly not constructed without good reason; it indicates that there were people to the south who reacted unfavourably to Hadrian's project, and who had to be hindered from trespassing in the Wall zone, or even from attempting to join their kinsfolk to the north. But by the third century the Vallum had served its purpose, and in the neighbourhood of the forts, at least, it was regularly filled in, and the undefended settlements which grew up outside them, and in many cases straggled far south of its line, indicate plainly that economic development and pacification of the frontier district had rendered it obsolete.

It is not yet certain that the Roman history of the site began as late as Hadrian's day. A fair amount of pottery from John Clayton's excavations, preserved in the museum, may well attest a fort of an earlier period: some pieces would best fall into place on a site occupied by Agricola, *c.* A.D. 80. But no structural evidence for an earlier fort has come to light as yet, and sufficient digging has been done on the site of the existing fort to make it reasonably certain that Turret 27*a* and the adjoining short lengths of Wall were the first Roman structures on it. There may well have been an earlier fort close by, however, guarding the crossing of the river on a branch road from the Stanegate north-eastwards, for which there is some evidence; only excavation can decide the question, which must therefore be referred to thus briefly, outside the historical outline. The place-name, by contrast, certainly antedates the arrival of the first Roman troops there: as in the great majority of cases in Celtic lands, the Romans preferred to adopt a local place-name (sometimes perhaps distorting its spelling or pronunciation, and on occasions even moving it from its old home to their new fort), rather than to invent a new one. It may be, therefore, that somewhere below the fort, or the village outside it, there remains some relic of an earlier occupation, such as the native farmstead which has recently been identified underlying the late first-century fort at Corbridge.

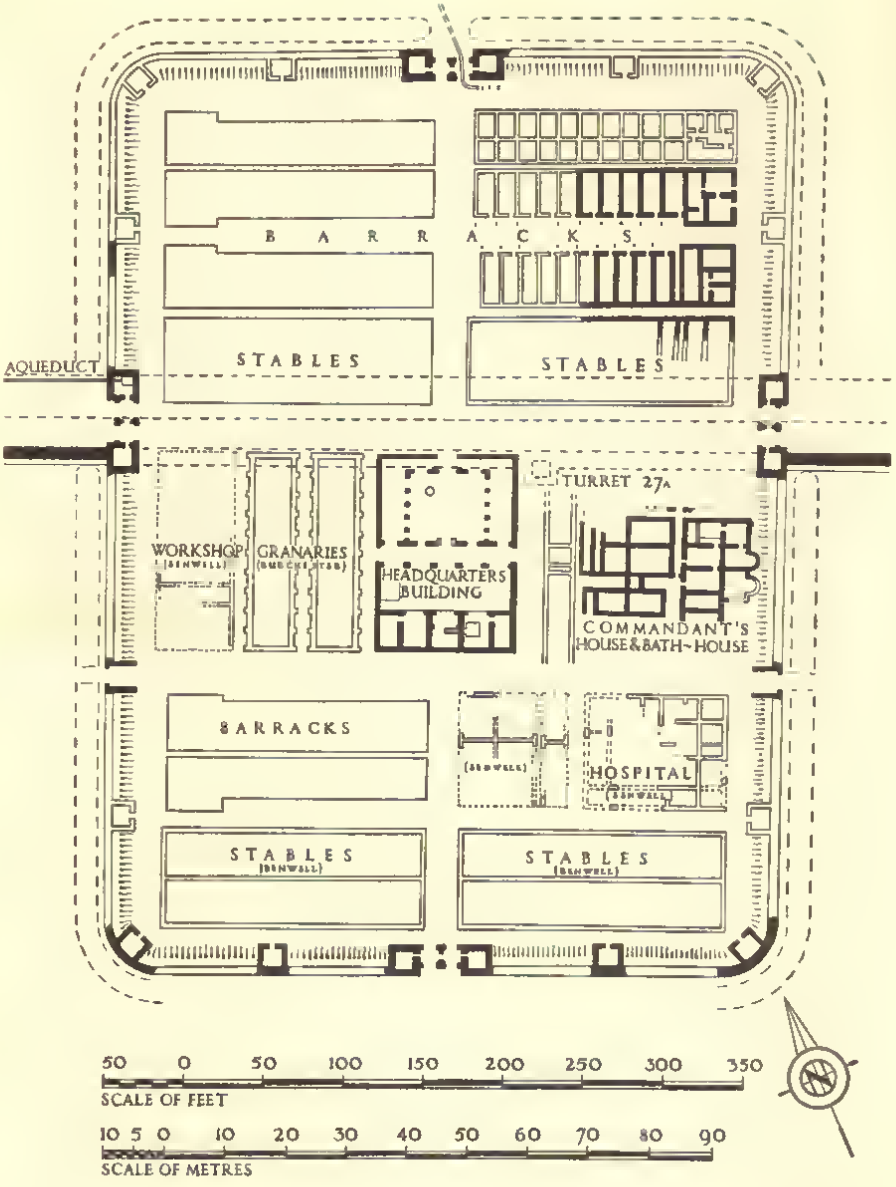

Fig. 1. Ground Plan of Fort
Visible walls are shown in solid black. The names in brackets are those of sister-forts supplying evidence for the outline plans of the buildings so marked.

III. The Fort

Introduction

CHESTERS is at present the best example of a cavalry fort visible anywhere within the territory of the Roman Empire. Such details of its lay-out as cannot now be seen, or still await investigation, can be supplied with a large measure of confidence as a result of excavations in the sister-forts at Benwell, Rudchester and Haltonchesters, or in other cavalry forts in Britain: for the Roman army was methodical to a degree, and at an early date standardised a basic pattern for its forts. Geology might dictate the materials to be used in the construction of this fort or that, and there was room for variation in detail; thus the gateways of the fort at Housesteads, assignable to the Second Legion, differ markedly in plan and in their calculable elevation from those at Chesters which, like Haltonchesters, was probably built by the Sixth—but in each case there was the same basic provision, with separate passages for traffic passing in and out, flanked by guard-rooms on the ground-floor and with towers above.

The standard shape for such forts has often been compared with a playing-card—oblong and with rounded corners; within their ramparts two streets running at right-angles to the long axis divided the interior into three approximately equal parts, the front and back thirds for barracks and stables, the central third for the headquarters building (*principia*), commandant's house (*praetorium*) and bath-house granaries (*horrea*) and often one or more workshops or storehouses. Enough has been recovered at Chesters to show that the standard plan was followed there in Hadrian's day, but in the latter part of the occupation various changes were made; for example, Clayton's excavations revealed two granaries inserted at a late period in the back third (*retentura*) of the fort, where barracks or stables must originally have stood (these granaries are not shown on the plan: their remains are said to have been removed on Clayton's orders, as being obviously secondary work).

Infantry forts, too, were built to the same basic plan (as at Housesteads), but they normally had smaller and less imposing headquarters, and a smaller house for the commanding officer; for the *praefectus equitum* ('cavalry colonel' would do as a translation) in command of an *ala* was senior in rank to the prefects or tribunes who commanded infantry battalions 500 or 1,000 strong respectively, drawing higher

pay and provided with more commodious accommodation accordingly. If his house looked in plan like one of the larger town-houses of the Mediterranean world, we must remember that most of the colonels of the Roman army were drawn from the leading families of Italian or provincial municipalities, many of them having risen to the chief magistracy of their home town before seeking and obtaining military appointments. If military service was to be made sufficiently attractive to the best kind of municipal worthy, it must obviously offer a standard of comfort comparable to that of his own home, for his wife as well as himself. Chesters has yielded the third-century tombstone of a tribune's daughter, set up by her parents, who presumably died here while on a visit from *Habitancum* (Risingham in Redesdale), where her father commanded the first cohort of Vangiones. There was the commandant's household staff, too, to be accommodated —freedmen or slaves; in the headquarters he had soldier clerks and orderlies, but his house would be run by his own civilian employees.

In their barracks, cavalry forts as a rule show a more generous allotment of cubic feet per man, a block for two *turmae* (troops), together just over 60 strong, occupying as much space as one for a *centuria* (company) of 80 or more infantry; there was a larger proportion of N.C.Os., too, in the cavalry, and accordingly we find more commodious accommodation for them in such forts (for details, see p. 21 below).

The defences of both cavalry and infantry forts are similar, and Chesters is a good example of the Hadrianic pattern, with a stone wall five feet thick, backed by a mound of earth and with a V-shaped ditch in front of it, interrupted only where roadways passed out from the gateways. In this case, as with the other cavalry forts of the same series, since the main side gates were north of the Wall (to allow a rapid sortie in strength), an extra pair of gateways was provided so that lateral traffic south of the Wall could enter or leave the fort freely: these were inserted at each end of the second cross-street (*via quintana*), taking such traffic behind the central group of administrative buildings instead of along the *via principalis* in front of them, as in most forts. The road from the front gate (*porta praetoria*) dropped a perpendicular on the *via principalis* at the entrance to the headquarters, from the back of which the *via decumana*, continuing on the same line, ran to the back gate—in this case, leading southwards into the civilian settlement, to the cemeteries which lay beyond its limits, and ultimately to join the Stanegate. Inside the fort-wall and rampart-mound, separating the latter from the internal buildings, ran the road known as the *intervallum*, where detachments normally fell in before moving to action-stations or to the parade-ground; sometimes ovens or cookhouses were inserted in the mound, or latrines (as at the south-east

PLATE I. *The Main East Gate from the N.E.*

PLATE II. *The Bath-house from the N.E.*

PLATE III. *Entrance to sunken strong-room in Headquarters Building, with part of Commandant's House beyond*

PLATE IV. *The E. abutment of the Roman bridge*

angle of Housesteads fort), and in several Wall forts, in later years, considerable lengths of the mound were removed, to permit the insertion of additional buildings of one kind or another. The huildings in the centre block were separated from one another by streets ten or twelve feet wide; the normal arrangement of barracks was in pairs, with a street of similar width between them, but only alleyways wide enough to take an eaves-drip separating them from the buildings against which they backed.

The Gateways

The four main gateways at Chesters are all of the same type, closely matching that at Haltonchesters which has yielded an inscription of the Sixth Legion; they had twin portals flanked at ground level by guard-rooms and ahove by towers between which the rampart-walk continued across the arches spanning the portals, probably at a height of 15 feet ahove ground level. The arches were built of massive ashlar, the remainder of the gateways in grouted rubhle faced with small ashlar such as that used for the fort-wall, smaller than the normal facing-stones of the Wall. The outer arch was set back some six feet from the line of the fort-wall, so that an attacker trying to break down the massive doors could he enfiladed from a side window of the gate-tower above. The doors were normally of oak, four inches thick and reinforced with iron, turning on iron pivots riding in iron shoes set in pivot-holes cut in the base of the jambs; at the main east gate and the south gate runways can be seen, to guide the pivot into position when the gate was first inserted (after which they would be filled in with lead, until the time came to remove the gate for repairs). Above, the door-post was inserted into an upper pivot-hole, deep enough to allow the door to be manoeuvred into position or removed. The twin doors to each portal when closed were held firm by bars four inches thick, fixed in sockets cut in the masonry on either side of the gate-passage, while in front they were held in position by a raised sill with central stop-block. Between the outer and inner arches a passage-way allowed sentries to pass from one side to the other, the doorways of the guard-rooms opening into the gate-passages. The lesser side gateways had single portals, without flanking guard-rooms, and were presumahly spanned by towers similar to those at the four angles of the fort and at interval positions between angles and gateways. Details of the gateways follow:

(1) *The North Gate* (porta praetoria)

This will be the first gateway that the visitor approaches, hut it is less well preserved than the others. Its west portal was blocked at a

comparitively early period, and its original sill-stone, exposed by Clayton, remains virtually unworn, showing that little or no wheeled traffic ever used it before it was blocked. The east portal has not been cleared down to its Hadrianic level, and shows sills and a stop-block of later date; a channel covered by slabs of re-used material passes through this portal, representing either an aqueduct entering or a drain leaving the fort, inserted in the third century or later.

(2) *The main West Gate* (porta principalis sinistra)

This gateway has had both portals blocked, ultimately at both ends of the passage-ways, the interior then being filled up solid. Dating evidence has not been recorded, but to judge by the comparable case of the west gate at Housesteads it was probably late in the fourth century; the blocking of the outer portals may have come somewhat earlier, as at the main east gateway. A settling-tank has been inserted in the north-east corner of the north guard-room, and an aqueduct brought to it in a stone channel from the west. According to a local tradition reported by Bruce there was formerly a deep pool, the 'Inglepool', somewhere close to the fort on this side, said to be fed by an aqueduct receiving its water from North Tyne three or four miles higher upstream, and this may perhaps represent one of the branches from that delivery-point. But the inscription (now in the museum) which records the provision of an aqueduct for the fort, in the governorship of Ulpius Marcellus, was found elsewhere (p. 17 below), and there may well have been more than one aqueduct in the course of its long occupation.

(3) *The lesser West Gate*

This was excavated by John Clayton's orders, between 1879 and 1884, but was filled in again; it is recorded as being similar to its counterpart on the east side of the fort.

(4) *The South Gate* (porta decumana)

This gateway is in some respects the most interesting of the series. It was excavated well (by the standards of the period) in 1879, and produced some noteworthy finds, including the 'Chesters diploma' (p. 29 below). Here too the west portal was walled up at a comparatively early date, leaving only one passage-way for traffic to pass through; but Clayton had the blocking wall removed, to expose the original sill. From Bruce's accounts it is clear that four superimposed occupation-levels were found in the east guard-room, matching the four periods of occupation on Hadrian's Wall; but here too most of the later work has been removed.

(5) *The lesser East Gate*

Nothing need be added to the description of this structure already given, but the inscription recording the aqueduct, it may be noted, was found re-used as a flagstone in or close to its passage-way; it had certainly been moved from its original position, for this was never the delivery-point of a water supply. From this gateway the 'military way', the main line of communication along the Wall, may be seen leading towards the bridge across North Tyne and gradually converging with the Wall, with which it shared the bridge.

(6) *The main East Gate* (porta principalis dextra)

This was excavated by Clayton in 1867, and he published a meticulous report on it, from which it is possible to work out the structural sequence which he revealed and removed, in order to expose the fine Hadrianic masonry; a small trial excavation in 1938 added useful details of the foundation-work of the northern tower, which overlies the filled-in ditch of the Wall and is consequently far deeper and more massive than that of the southern tower. The walls of the tower stand twelve courses high at one point, and the heavy ashlar of the double archway is better preserved here than at any of the other gateways. The unworn thresholds show that wheeled traffic never used this entrance, but Clayton's report makes it clear that it was only in the third structural period, *c.* A.D. 300 at earliest, that the outer portals were walled up, and it was later still before the inner portals were dealt with in the same way, the intervening space being filled up solid. That will have been one consequence of the fourth-century change, already referred to, by which the fort lost its function as the base for a mobile unit, to become the stronghold of a frontier village. The inscription of A.D. 139 was found re-used as a flag in the secondary floor here.

The Angle- and Interval-Towers

Most of these are still invisible below the turf, but the towers at the south-east and south-west angles, and two between them and the south gate, were excavated by Clayton and remain exposed. Each provides a room at ground level, normally used as a store or the like; the more easterly interval-tower yielded the skeletons of two new-born babies, suggesting tragedy—or a breach of discipline—at some time unspecified. The towers were no doubt carried as high as the gate-towers, perhaps some 25 feet as against the 15 feet of the rampart-walk.

The Headquarters (principia)

This is the most impressive example of the type to be seen in any Roman fort north of the Alps, though for certain details its evidence needs to be supplemented by that from other northern forts, such as Chesterholm (likewise in the custody of the Ancient Monuments Department) or South Shields. Its dimensions, 130 feet long by 90 feet wide overall, make it almost twice the area of that at Housesteads (90 by 75 feet) or the Diocletianic headquarters at Chesterholm (90 by 80 feet); and it may well have had a forehall, astride the *via principalis*, to add to its length and impressiveness: excavation is still needed to test this possibility. The main entrance is at the junction of the *via praetoria* with the *via principalis*, so that a visitor entering the fort through the north gate would have a view straight through, across a flagged courtyard open to the sky, through a monumental doorway at its far side, across the great hall and into the regimental chapel (*sacellum*), lit by clerestory windows like the hall itself, where the statue of an emperor, life-size or larger, flanked by the regiment's flag and standards, would attract and focus his attention. The courtyard was surrounded on three sides by a verandah the drip from whose roof was carried away in a gutter cut in the flags; a well was provided near the north-west corner, mainly for ceremonial use (it can never have given enough water for 500 men and their horses); near it is a *phallus* cut in relief on a raised roundel, as a precaution against the evil eye. Stone-robbers have removed much of the massive masonry at the south side of the courtyard, but it is clear that the hall was entered from it through three arched apertures, matching those of the *sacellum* and the two main offices, to which reference will be made soon; there were lesser doorways into the hall from the east and west arms of the verandah. The hall was also provided with wide doorways at each end, opening on to the side-streets which separated it from the granaries to west and the commandant's house and other buildings to east; it was therefore possible to gain access to it without passing through the courtyard, in which (by the same token) other activities could go on without interfering with business in the hall.

The south side of the hall gave access to five compartments. In the centre was the *sacellum*, with a wide arched entrance, reduced to door-width by stone screens with metal grilles above (as at Chesterholm and Housesteads); to right and left of the *sacellum* were two pairs of rooms, the nearer one on either side having a similar entrance, while the other room in each case was approached by an ordinary doorway from the first, making an inner office conveniently shut off from the main hall. The western pair of rooms were the offices for

the regimental adjutant (*cornicularius*) and his clerks, the eastern pair housing the standard-bearers (*signiferi*) and their assistants, who in the Roman army had the duty of maintaining company or troop records, in addition acting as managers of a savings-bank system: only a small proportion of a soldier's pay was issued to him in cash, the remainder being accounted for by the standard-bearers' clerks, any balance after compulsory stoppages being held to his credit, while he could deposit money for safe keeping too, if he was of a frugal turn of mind. Thus the eastern pair of rooms was used for the records of the sixteen *turmae*, while regimental records (including returns consolidated from those submitted by the *turmae*) were compiled in the western pair; in between was the shrine, in front of which sentries normally stood on guard. In the Severan reconstruction a short stairway was inserted behind the front portion or ante-chapel of the *sacellum*, leading down to a sunken strong-room below the main standard-bearers' office, the floor of which must therefore have been raised considerably; but Clayton's excavations lowered the floors of the hall and the other rooms to their original Hadrianic level. The strong-room is still covered by its third-century roof, formed of two parallel ribs spanned by large slabs, and has a flagged floor; it was found by chance in 1803, long before the rest of the building was examined, but was only excavated completely shortly before 1840, when it is recorded that its door was found 'in a sadly decayed state', made of wood strongly sheathed with plates of iron and rivetted together with large square iron nails, the door opening inwards. At the west end of the hall there are the remains of a square structure abutting on its west wall. This was the *tribunal*, the platform on which the commandant took his seat on formal or ceremonial occasions; it was approached by a short flight of steps (now removed) from just outside the adjutant's outer office, in which he could have a last-minute conference before the formal proceedings began. It seems possible that the original strong-room was below the *tribunal*, entered by a low door on the staircase side, but the structure is now too reduced for certainty to be attainable.

The *principia* was the nerve-centre of the fort, as well as the most imposing building inside it. Besides the regimental chapel, and the offices in which a wide variety and great quantity of paper-work was performed, and the great hall in which the commandant addressed his officers and men, heard applications for leave, dealt with men on charges or even, in some cases, sat as district magistrate on matters brought before him by civilians from the surrounding district, the building included round its open courtyard accommodation for notice-boards on which orders could be posted, and the shrines or meeting-places for N.C.O.s which formed a striking feature of the

Roman army, at least in the third century. In the courtyard itself defaulters might be put on punishment drill, or such religious ceremonies might be performed as did not require the greater elbow-room of the unit's parade-ground, somewbere outside the fort; sometimes altars or statues of deities stood in such courtyards, but there is no evidence for them in this case.

The Granaries

In the Hadrianic lay-out there were presumably two granaries between the beadquarters and the west rampart, wbere as yet no excavation has been done; on the plan two granaries, similar to that excavated in the sister-fort of Rudchester, are allowed for (in outline only). The two granaries found and removed by Clayton, in the barrack-area behind the headquarters, are not shown on the plan as they were undoubtedly later insertions.

The Commandant's House and Bath-house

Parts of these two buildings were examined by Clayton in 1843, and it bas been suggested above that it was probably bere that Bisbop Pococke, in 1760, was shown the 'cavity called Adam's Garden' and the 'narrow building terminating in a semi-circle'. Neither building has been uncovered completely, and both have been so much modified by successive reconstructions, between Hadrian's day and the close of the fourth century, that their original plans cannot yet be determined. But it seems clear that tbe more easterly building has been a batb-house, smaller but more luxurious than that outside the fort (p. 23 below), its neigbbour to the west being the commandant's bouse proper; this will originally have consisted of four ranges of rooms round a small open courtyard. Many of the rooms were ultimately provided with central heating of the standard Roman type, hot air circulating below their floors and in some cases up flues in the thickness of their walls. Between this building and the headquarters are the remains of a narrow structure, secondary work at earliest, which overlies part of it; this is presumably a workshop or store.

The Barracks

Parts of the barrack-blocks excavated by Nathaniel George Clayton in the north-east quarter of the fort, have been left exposed, serving to give at least an impression of the type. As is indicated on the plan, there must originally have been six blocks in the front third of the

fort and two in the back, each block housing two *turmae*; at the end nearest the rampart was a suite for the troop-commanders (*decuriones*), the remainder of the long building being subdivided into ten equal compartments, once subdivided by partitions into inner sleeping quarters and an outer living-room: cooking was normally done on the verandah which fronted the block, each section (*contubernium*) messing together. The strength of the *turma* was 30 men apart from the decurion and his two senior N.C.O.s; if the latter shared the troop-commanders' suite, each compartment of the block will have housed a section of six men, five compartments being allocated to the men of each *turma*. But eight was a more normal section in the case of infantry, whose barracks usually contained compartments of similar dimensions; the trooper, therefore, was at least given more elbow-room (though some of it might be needed for hanging his saddle and harness).

The Stables

None of these are to be seen at present, but it seems clear that they must have occupied the positions shown on the plan (in outline, based on those excavated at Benwell and Carzield), each block accommodating the horses for two *turmae*.

Other Internal Buildings

Another building which we should expect to find, but which has not yet been discovered at Chesters, is a hospital like that which at Housesteads occupies a place in the central block of buildings, immediately behind the headquarters. At the cavalry fort of Benwell a similar building was placed in the *retentura*, and it is probable that Chesters will have been given a similar arrangement (as has been indicated on the plan): the normal military hospital is rectangular, with a small open courtyard surrounded by four ranges of rooms, wards or operating theatres or the like. In addition there will probably have been workshops for the unit's farriers and armourers and, inserted in the rampart-mound, cook-houses and at least one latrine-building comparable to that which may be examined at Housesteads.

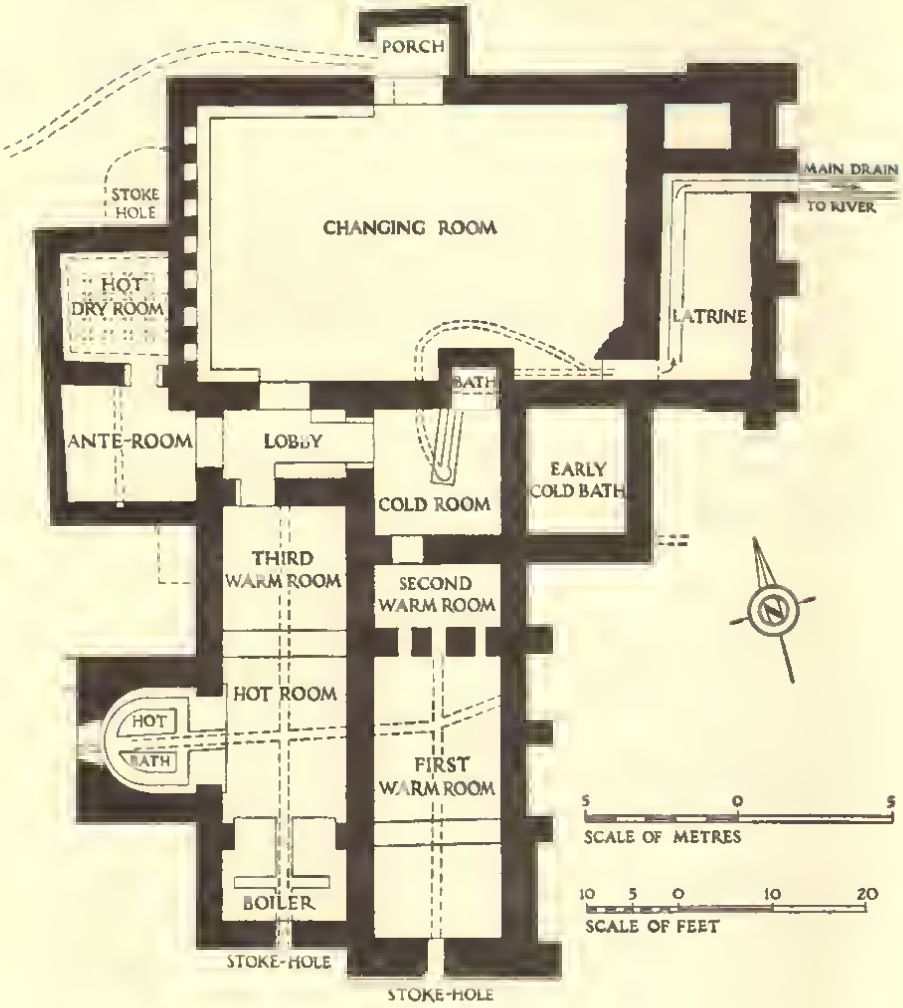

Fig. 2. Plan of the external Bath-house

IV. The Bath-house

The main bath-house for the officers and rank and file was built, as usual, some distance outside the fort, on a shelf quarried out of the hank-side a short way downstream from the bridge, its main entrance opening on to the 'military way'. It was first excavated in 1884–85, and received its fullest study from Sir George Macdonald in 1930; for full particulars, and a splendid series of photographs taken at the time of the original excavation (when much of the structure was in better condition than in later years), reference must be made to his paper in *Archaeologia Aeliana*, cited ahove (p. 5). Here it will be sufficient to give a brief description of the lay-out, as shown on the plan, though it must he borne in mind that the building has undergone several modifications at one time or another, and in its excavated state it represents a compromise between complete uncovering of the original plan and display of later features of interest.

Bathers entered down a flight of steps from the 'military way', a secondary porch giving shelter to people waiting to be admitted into the entrance-hall or changing room; this had a flagged floor, a latrine opening off its east end and seven niches in its west wall. The purpose of the niches remains uncertain, some writers suggesting that they were to hold statues representing the guardian deities of the seven days of the week, others that they contained lockers in which valuahles could be deposited while their owners were stripped. After changing in the hall, bathers passed southwards into a small lobby off which three doorways opened—to left into the cold bath-room (*frigidarium*) with a washing-bowl in the centre of it and a large cold bath at its east end; to rigbt into two rooms reserved for dry heat (the first warm and the second hot), provided by a charcoal furnace to north of the latter room, with provisions for hot air to he admitted direct into that room at floor level, as well as helow the floor and up flues in the walls; or straight on into rooms in which moist beat was provided, first a warm room (*tepidarium*) and then a hot one (*caldarium*), off the west side of which was a hot hath in an apsidal hay which was once lighted by a window four feet wide and glazed (the excavators found some of the window-glass outside it). Parallel to this last pair of rooms, on the river side of it, is another pair, which may represent an enlargement of the provision for moist heat. The west wall of the building is standing as much as ten feet high in places, but elsewhere

it bas suffered more or less considerably from stone-robbing in post-Roman times.

The bath-house was an important centre of military life, offering opportunity not merely for cleanliness (in which the Romans themselves believed, and taught their subjects to follow their example) but also for relaxation; the entrance-hall must have been used as something like a club-room for men who had completed the series of ablutions, comparable to those of a Turkisb bath, which the establishment provided for. But such buildings called for frequent attention to keep them in good order, and in the declining years of the Roman occupation were usually allowed to go out of commission, or used for some other purpose than bathing. The excavators found thirty-three human skeletons in the building, though their account does not enable us to determine whether tbey represented burials in a ruin or people who had sought shelter in it and had been overwbelmed in some disaster.

V. The Bridge

THE North Tyne has changed its course slightly since the time when the Romans first bridged it here, moving rather nearer to the fort; the west abutment of the bridge is now wholly submerged, but may be seen without difficulty when the river is low, while the east abutment is nearly 50 feet from the present east bank, which overlies the first of the three piers: the other two, examined when the river was low, have cutwaters on the upstream face and square faces downstream. The four water-bays were each 35 feet 6 inches wide, and the overall length of the bridge, from abutment to abutment, was 190 feet; its effective width was just over 20 feet, sufficient to carry the 'military way' as well as the Wall, or a raised continuation of the Wall's sentry-walk—for details of the superstructure are still uncertain. But there is evidence, still visible in the massive east abutment, for an earlier and longer bridge, of four piers and five water-bays, only 10 feet wide and designed to carry the Wall alone, no doubt on flat arches as in the case of the bridge across the Irthing in Cumberland (also preserved as an Ancient Monument); it seems clear that in the first phase of the Wall's existence its lateral service-road must have crossed the river further downstream, perhaps by a timber bridge, and that the 'military way' and the widened and shortened bridge belong to a later period, perhaps as late as the Severan reconstruction, *circa* A.D. 205. The eastern abutment of the later bridge, at present approached by a footpath from the modern bridge at Chollerford, half a mile upstream (and not from the fort itself), is perhaps the most impressive Roman structure in the north of Britain. It is built of very massive blocks of carefully dressed stone, fastened together by iron cramps and ties run in with lead; it encloses within it the easternmost pier of the original bridge, which had cutwaters upstream and down and was tied together with a more elaborate and systematic series of double dovetailed cramps. It is uncertain at what period the Wall was reconstructed, on this side of the river, to terminate in a square tower comparable to one of the Wall turrets; no trace remains of a westward resumption of the Wall to cross the bridge, and it must be supposed that latterly a raised parapet on the upstream side of the bridge was thought sufficient. Another feature of particular interest is the mill-race, carried through below the tower, to work an undershot water-mill of the type also provided for in the Irthing bridge and at the Haltwhistle Burn, west of Housesteads: portions of the large

millstones from the latter mill may be seen outside the museum, and a barrel-shaped stone, pierced with eight slots regularly spaced round its greatest circumference, now lying on the abutment (where Clayton's excavators left it on view), has been convincingly explained as the hub of the Chesters water-wheel. It was the west abutment and perhaps the two piers below the present course of the river that the early visitors saw and wondered at: the east abutment was first discovered in 1860, and cleared on Clayton's orders in the same year.

VI. The Civilian Settlement

THE early visitors record the discovery of Roman tombstones, some of them inscribed, 200 yards or more from the south gate of the fort, in a field called the Ox-close; Bruce, no doubt relying on information provided by Clayton, defines the position of the cemetery as 'where the river bends rapidly to the east, and where the sunk fence defining the park of Chesters joins the river's bank'. Roman law required burials to be made outside built-up areas, and it was thus a fair inference that the intervening space, between cemetery and fort, was occupied by civilians' houses and shops, and the early accounts speak of considerable ruins south of the fort; but Nathaniel Clayton's grass park left no surface indications of them, and it was not until the dry summer of 1949 gave ideal conditions for air photography that the importance and extent of the settlement became evident (*Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4th series, xxxvi, 227–244). Air photographs in the museum, with diagrams to indicate the features which they reveal, show that it contained something of a street-system (and not merely ribbon-development along the southward road), and that some of the buildings in it were really substantial; only excavation can give us detailed evidence for its history and for the way of life of the folk who lived in it, but analogy with the settlement at Housesteads, partly excavated in 1931–34 and 1960–61, and with similar settlements outside other frontier forts, justifies the assumption that this settlement grew in size and prosperity in the third century and the first half of the fourth, as the economic exploitation of the surrounding district developed and military operations became less and less frequent in the Wall area. One day it will certainly repay excavation.

VII. The Museum

THE Clayton Memorial Museum contains one of the most important collections of Roman relics in Britain; in the present Guide, only some of the objects from Chesters itself can be referred to, but copies of a general guide to the collection may be obtained from the custodian by visitors who wish for further particulars.

For a discussion of some important military inscriptions, including the fragments from a slab recording rebuilding under Severus's governor Alfenus Senecio, reference may be made to *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4th series, xvi 237–55; attention may also be directed to two fine slabs, one recording the provision of an aqueduct for the Second Asturians and the other attesting their loyalty to the emperor known to posterity as Elagabalus (A.D. 218–222), but defaced after his death by the erasure of the title *Antoniniana* which the unit had borne in honour of him; there is also a building-record of the same reign, precisely dated to 30 October 221, on which the names and titles first of Elagabalus and then of Severus Alexander, his junior colleague and successor (emperor A.D. 222–235), have been erased: it seems to have been found in the headquarters building, re-used as a flag in a later reconstruction, so that its original position can only be guessed. But the most impressive of the stones from Chesters is the headless statue of a goddess, standing on the back of a cow (whose head and legs are missing), identifiable as *Juno Regina*, the consort of the Syrian god whom the Romans knew and worshipped as *Juppiter Dolichenus*. The earliest record of this fine piece, artistically far superior to most of the sculptures in the museum, is that by Lingard, who in 1807 saw it 'in a dry wall', apparently outside the fort; it presumably comes from a temple in the external settlement. Other temples to the same Syrian deities are attested or implied by inscriptions from Benwell, Greatchesters and Carvoran, and two fragments of an altar to Dolichenus, found re-used in a late repair to Chesters bath-house, may perhaps be taken to indicate the general area within which this particular temple is to be sought. Another sculpture, cruder and to a smaller scale, portrays a river-god reclining as though at a banquet; it was found by Clayton during his excavation of the commandant's bath-house, where it once no doubt adorned the delivery-point of water to the cold bath.

The most important discovery in metal, the so-called Chesters diploma, is now in the British Museum, but an electrotype copy of

it will be seen in one of the showcases in the museum. It was found in the east guard-room of the south gate, 'about 4 ft. above the level of the original floor', with other objects in debris apparently representing the destruction of A.D. 197. The diploma was an official document, engraved on two bronze plates which would normally be fastened together by wire and sealed, attesting the grant of Roman citizenship to a time-expired auxiliary soldier whose name, with that of his unit and the officer commanding it, were extracted from a list published in Rome; the extract also contained the text of the imperial decree which made the grant to the time-expired men serving in all the units which it listed, normally all stationed in the same province and under a governor whose name was likewise given. In this case, the diploma is fragmentary, and the name of the recipient and of his unit are missing; but the date, A.D. 146, and the name of the governor of Britain at that time, Papirius Aelianus, are preserved. How the diploma found its way into the guard-room, or perhaps into an upper room in the gate-tower, can only be conjectured; there is some reason to think that when an ex-soldier settled down into civilian life he might often find it wise to deposit his diploma for safe custody with the local authority—in this case, the commander of the fort; and it is perhaps likeliest that the veteran who decided to settle in the village outside its gates had previously served in the fort: but we cannot say which of the three cavalry regiments or the 11 infantry battalions listed in the diploma was stationed at Chesters under Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138–161). Later in the second century, it seems, the fort was occupied by a battalion 500 strong, the First Cohort of Dalmatians; while this Guide was being written, conservation became necessary in the approach to the sunken strong-room of the headquarters building, and it was found that one of the steps was an inscribed slab, face downwards, recording construction by that unit: the style of the inscription, and a consideration of other evidence for the history of the unit, combine to suggest that it was at Chesters in the latter part of the second century.

Other material from Chesters in the museum can only be referred to in the most summary way. There is an exceptionally fine series of *iron* tools and weapons, *pottery* (mainly fragmentary, but including an interesting series of decorated Samian ware, much of it assignable to the workshops of particular potters), and miscellaneous small objects, including *signet-rings*, *beads*, *spindle-whorls*, a knife-handle of *bone* carved to represent a greyhound chasing a hare, *bone* weaving-combs and an *ivory* comb. The tools attest the presence of smiths and leather-workers, farmers and farriers, not all of whom are likely to have been serving soldiers; and the spindle-whorls and weaving-combs no

doubt indicate how some of the womenfolk in the settlement occupied their time. A slate palette, for mixing drugs or paints, and a 'patent' ink-pot, bear witness to other forms of activity; but labels in the cases will serve to explain such items as attract the visitor's attention, and there is no need to say more about the collection.

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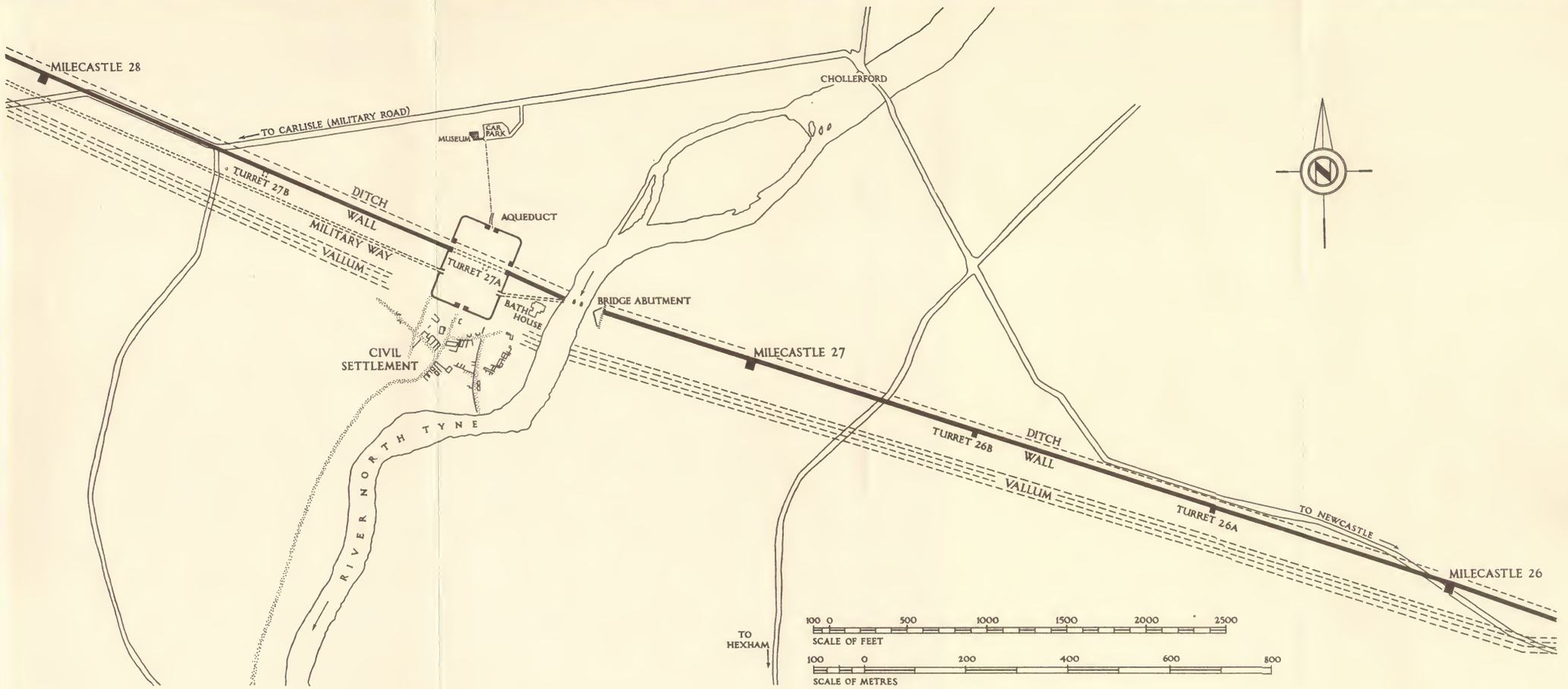

Fig. 3. Plan of Fort and environs